



Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

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August 10, 2021

Dear Single State Authority Directors and State Mental Health Authority Commissioners:

People with mental illness and substance use disorder are more likely to have co-morbid physical health issues like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity. Such chronic illnesses are associated with higher instances of contracting coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as well as higher risk of death or a poor outcome from an episode of COVID-19. To address this concern, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), will invest \$100 million dollars to expand dedicated testing and mitigation resources for people with mental health and substance use disorders.

As COVID-19 cases rise among unvaccinated people and where the more transmissible Delta virus variant is surging, this funding will expand activities to detect, diagnose, trace, and monitor infections and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in homeless shelters, treatment and recovery facilities, domestic violence shelters and federal, state and local correctional facilities—some of the most impacted and highest risk communities across the country. These funds will provide resources and flexibility for states to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency and ensure the continuity of services to support individuals connected to the behavioral health system. This one-time funding for awards was authorized under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2) and Section 711 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 711(c)). SAMHSA will supplement the ARP funding for state grantees. The performance period for this funding is September 1, 2021 – September 30, 2025. Targeted support is necessary for mental health and substance use treatment providers to overcome barriers towards achieving and maintaining high COVID-19 testing rates. From the provider perspective, these barriers include limited financial and personnel resources to support ongoing testing efforts. Providers have limited staff and physical resources and COVID-19 testing activities must be balanced against COVID-19 vaccinations and other health care services. From the consumer perspective, these barriers include hesitancy in accepting vaccines and challenges with health care access. Recipients may allocate reasonable funds for the administrative management of these grants. SAMHSA envisions the maximum support possible for COVID-19 testing and mitigation; toward that goal, recipients are encouraged to expend a minimum of 85 percent of funding for allowable COVID-19 testing and mitigation activities.

The list below includes examples of allowable activities. While this list is not exhaustive, any activity not included on this list must be directly related to COVID-19 testing and mitigation. All recipients are strongly encouraged to work with state or local health departments to coordinate activities. The state must demonstrate that the related expense is directly and reasonably related to the provision of COVID-19 testing or COVID-19 mitigation activities. The related expense must be consistent with relevant clinical and public health guidance. For additional examples, you can visit the CDC Community Mitigation Framework website. Funding may not be used for any activity related to vaccine purchase or distribution.

SAMHSA, through this supplemental funding, allocates \$50 million each for Mental Health Block Grant (MHBG) and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block grants (SABG) to the states. States have until September 30, 2025, to expend these funds. SAMHSA asks that states consider the following in developing a COVID-19 Mitigation Funding Plan:

- Coordinate and partner with state and local health departments/agencies on how to better align the state/provider mental health and substance use COVID-19 mitigation efforts and activities; develop guidance for partnering with state/local health departments; disseminating sample training curriculums.
- Testing education, establishment of alternate testing sites, test result processing, arranging for the processing of test results, and engaging in other activities within the CDC Community Mitigation Framework to address COVID-19 in rural communities.
- Rapid onsite COVID-19 testing and for facilitating access to testing services. Training and technical assistance on implementing rapid onsite COVID-19 testing and facilitating access to behavioral health services, including the development of onsite testing confidentiality policies; and implementing model program practices.
- Behavioral health services for those in short-term housing for people who are at high risk for COVID-19.
- Testing for staff and consumers in shelters, group homes, residential treatment facilities, day programs, and room and board programs. Purchase of resources for testing-related operating and administrative costs otherwise borne by these housing programs. Hire workers to coordinate resources, develop strategies and support existing community partners to prevent infectious disease transmission in these settings. States may use this funding to procure COVID-19 tests and other mitigation supplies such as handwashing stations, hand sanitizer and masks for people experiencing homelessness and for those living in congregate settings.
- Funds may be used to relieve the burden of financial costs for the administration of tests and the purchasing of supplies necessary for administration such as personal protective equipment (PPE); supporting mobile health units, particularly in medically underserved areas; and expanding local or tribal programs workforce to implement COVID-response services for those connected to the behavioral health system.
- Utilize networks and partners to promote awareness of the availability of funds, assist providers/programs with accessing funding, and assist with operationalizing the intent of said funding to ensure resources to mitigate the COVID-19 health impacts and reach the most under-served, under-resourced, and marginalized communities in need.
- Expanding local or tribal programs workforce to implement COVID-response services for those connected to the behavioral health system.
- Provide subawards to eligible entities for programs within the state that are designed to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness; funding could be used for operating

and administrative expenses of the facilities to provide onsite testing and mobile health services; and may be used to provide prevention services to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- Develop and implement strategies to address consumer hesitancy around testing. Ensure access for specific community populations to address long-standing systemic health and social inequities that have put some consumers at increased risk of getting COVID-19 or having severe illness.
- Installing temporary structures, leasing of properties, and retrofitting facilities as necessary to support COVID-19 testing and COVID-19 mitigation.
- Education, rehabilitation, prevention, treatment, and support services for symptoms occurring after recovery from acute COVID-19 infection, including, but not limited to, support for activities of daily living.
- Other activities to support COVID-19 testing including planning for implementation of a COVID-19 testing program, hiring staff, procuring supplies to provide testing, training providers and staff on COVID-19 testing procedures, and reporting data to HHS on COVID-19 testing activities.
- Promote behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases (healthy hygiene practices, stay at home when sick, practice physical distancing to lower the risk of disease spread, cloth face coverings, getting vaccinated).
- Maintain healthy environments (clean and disinfect, ensure ventilation systems operate properly, install physical barriers and guides to support social distancing if appropriate).
- Behavioral health services to staff working as contact tracers and other members of the COVID-related workforce. Maintain health operations for staff, including building measures to cope with employee stress and burnout.
- Investigate COVID-19 cases; the process of working with a consumer who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and includes, but is not limited to:
 - Discuss test result or diagnosis with consumers;
 - Assess patient symptom history and health status;
 - Provide instructions and support for self-isolation and symptom monitoring; and
 - Identify people (contacts) who may have been exposed to COVID-19.
- Conduct contact tracing: the process of notifying people (contacts) of their potential exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 and includes, but is not limited to:
 - Provide information about the virus;
 - Discuss their symptom history and other relevant health information; and
 - Provide instructions for self-quarantine and monitoring for symptoms.

The following are ineligible costs for the purposes of this funding:

- Costs already paid for by other federal or state programs, other federal or state COVID-19 funds, or prior COVID-19 supplemental funding.
- Any activity related to purchasing, disseminating, or administering COVID-19 vaccines.
- Construction projects.
- Support of lobbying/advocacy efforts.
- Facility or land purchases.
- COVID-19 mitigation activities conducted prior to 9/1/2021.
- Financial assistance to an entity other than a public or nonprofit private entity.

Required Submission

1. COVID-19 Response Workplan and Overview

States must submit separate plans by October 1, 2021 for expending these funds for both MHBG and SABG. States must explain the types of activities, including expenditures. Provide a detailed plan by October 1, 2021 on how the state plans to implement COVID-19 testing and mitigation activities within the public mental health and or substance abuse system. *(SAMHSA recommends that each state/jurisdiction's MH and SUD authorities work together in expending the MHBG and SABG funds in a coordinated way, if feasible.)*

2. COVID-19 Response Budget and Budget Justification

States must submit a budget and a budget justification by October 1, 2021 capturing all expenses, including costs for administration at the state level and a plan to distribute it to providers, and subsequent reasons for the expenses in narrative format.

3. Annual Report

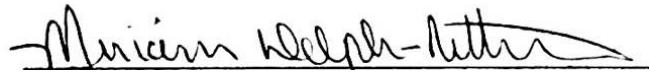
Annually, by December 31, until the funds expire, states must upload a narrative report including activities and expenditures.

Using the WebBGAS Revision Request for the FFY 2021 Block Grant Application, upload the document (Microsoft Word or pdf) using the tab into the State Information Section, Chief Executive Officer's Funding Agreement – Certifications and Assurances/Letter Designating Signatory Authority. SAMHSA will issue a revision request to states to submit the application. Please title this document "COVID Mitigation Funding Plan 2021(MH)" for MHBG and "COVID Mitigation Funding Plan 2021 (SA)" for SABG."

States must upload separate proposals based on Mental Health Block Grant and Substance Abuse Block Grant guidance into the WebBGAS system. Upon submission, SAMHSA will review the proposal to ensure it is complete and responsive. Proposals must be submitted to WebBGAS by Friday, October 1, 2021, 11:59 pm EDT. States can start utilizing the resources as soon as the states' plans are approved by SAMHSA.

SAMHSA is ready and willing to assist you in addressing the needs of individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders. Please feel free to contact your SAMHSA state project officers and grants management specialists with any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Miriam Delphin-Rittmon", written over a horizontal line.

Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary for Mental Health
and Substance Use